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AUTHOR Beauchamp, Denise
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ABSTRACT

Based on the author's experience working with the French minority in the Yukon, this study investigated the contributions of the school and of the family to the success at Ecole Emilie-Tremblay, a school of children from exogamous families (those with parents from different language groups). Three areas of parental involvement were defined--academic, sociocultural, and political--and interviews with parents and questionnaires for students were designed to explore the parents' influence within each of these areas. The contributions of the school were investigated in terms of adaptation to its clientele, through interviews with the principal, teachers, and trustees of the school board. Findings revealed four main issues that determine the level and influence of exogamous parents' involvement in their children's schooling: (1) parents' recognition that they are the primary and most important educators; (2) parents' understanding of the school's mission; (3) school adaptation to its unique exogamous clientele; and (4) the willingness of Anglophone parents to embrace the French language and culture. Exogamous parents appear to contribute to their child's education in light of their own first language, and lack of parental support raises the danger of children becoming semi-lingual adults, strong in neither French nor English. (Contains 13 references.) (MOK)

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An inquiry into the contributions of the school and of the family to children's successes in French Minority Schools:

A case study of exogamous families at École Émilie-Tremblay

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An inquiry into the contributions of the school and of the
family to children's successes in French Minority Schools:

A case study of exogamous families at École Émilie-Tremblay

By

Denise Beauchamp
Bachelor of Second Language Teaching
Whitehorse, Yukon

A project submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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We accept this project as conforming to the required standard:

Dr. Mary-Claire Tarlow, Chair

Date

Dr. Janice Parmelee

Date

Dr. Marjorie Fields

Date

Abstract

This paper investigates the contributions of the school and of the family to the success of children from exogamous families at École Émilie-Tremblay. Three areas of parental involvement are defined: academic, sociocultural and political. To explore the parent's influence within each of these areas, interviews with exogamous parents and questionnaires for students were designed accordingly. The contributions of the school are analysed in terms of adaptation to its clientele. Interviews with the principal, the teachers and trustees of the French school board were conducted.

The findings are expressed in terms of family and school patterns. Interpretations as to how exogamous parents are contributing to their child's education in the light of their first language are revealed. Questions are raised about the danger of forming semi lingual adults if neither the English nor the French language is mastered. Different avenues to adapt to exogamous families and support students are explored.

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Chapt 1 : Introduction

For the past six years, I have been teaching at École Émilie-Tremblay, the only French minority school in the Yukon. I taught a combined grade one and two for the first year. I then left for a year of travelling. Since my return, my teaching role is that of a specialist as I work with students, teachers and exogamous parents, providing linguistic support to students and ideas to their parents in order to support the school's efforts. Team teaching and small group sessions with students are the two models we chose to best respond to the need of our students. The concerns of parents and teachers, in regard to language exposure and language abilities of students, are at the centre of my duties. The objective is to enable the student to adjust to their classroom level.

The daily mixing with students and parents made me more sensitive to several realities that characterize Francophones in a minority situation. One of these characteristics is exogamy: marriage outside of one's language group. As a teacher, and as a parent in an exogamous marriage, I am constantly reminded of the pros and cons relating to intercultural marriages; particularly when it deals with children's education and the transmission of language and culture. For example, the predominant usage of English in the community and often in the home of exogamous families make it difficult for children to pursue successfully their schooling in French. It can lead to students being at risk in their language skills and in their cognitive development as neither the French nor the English language may be fully mastered. The high ratio of students from exogamous families, sixty-five percent, has challenged me to explore the issues of parental involvement and children's successes in our school within the context of French/English homes. Therefore, the intent of this

research is to find out how exogamous parents can best be involved at École Émilie-Tremblay and how the school, in return, can best adapt to the needs of these parents for the benefit of their children.

Chapt 2: Literature Review

Many research findings from the last thirty years demonstrate the importance of parental involvement in the academic success of students, "but it is not until recently that school authorities and teachers are discovering that parents play a major role in the education of their children" (Chavkin & Williams, Jr., 1987). Studies of individual families show that what the family does is more important to student success than family income or education; this is true whether the child is in preschool or in upper grades (Coleman 1966, Epstein 1991, Keith and Keith, 1993). On the same note, Anne C. Henderson writes: "When parents are involved, children do better in school and the whole school is enhanced". (1987). According to her research, the link between parental involvement and student achievement is undeniable. "For children to succeed, parents must take an active role". (Henderson, 1987). She found this to be true for all her case studies. "Children whose parents help them at home and stay in touch with the school, score higher than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved", (Henderson, 1987). Often the non-involvement of parents in their education equates to children and teenagers who dislike school. Recent studies have indicated that most Hispanic students dislike school and eventually drop out, not because they were academically incapable, but because of family problems (Fernandez & Shu, 1988). This argument is reinforced in the study by Metcalf and Gaier who state, "As a result of parental indifference, children will cease to strive for academic achievement, and their academic and social aspirations will subside and eventually disappear", (1987).

These studies show that the overall significance of parents in the educational setting must be acknowledged and recognized as an important way to improve student

academic performance.

Parental involvement in public schools is a primary concern in today's North American schools. Teachers ranked strengthening parents' roles in their children's learning as the issue that should receive the highest priority in public education policy over the next few years (Louis Harris and Associates 1993).

New reform efforts, such as Goals 2000: Educate America Act, have also recognized the significance of parents in the educational setting and is encouraging and promoting family involvement in school improvement efforts.

Organisations such as the Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers (Texas PTA) are constantly researching the subject of parental involvement and developing initiatives to help children prosper. The report of the Texas PTA, School-Family Partnerships states,

Schools must become places where families feel wanted and recognized for their strengths and potential. Too often families do not feel welcome in their school. Schools that help families feel welcome and show them how to improve learning at home are likely to have more support from parents and motivated students (1992).

The same principles prevail for minority schools such as École Émilie-Tremblay, it must be a place where families feel wanted and recognized for their strengths and potential regardless of their language proficiency. In her research about parental involvement and language minority populations, Jose R. Figueria writes,

It is important, particularly in the context of minority education, to offer parents a significant role in their children's schooling to better understand the concerns and the aspirations of minority populations (1993).

Further in her discussion about the role of the institutions she adds:

An appropriate program requires that schools gain a complete and accurate picture of the population which it serves. Schools must be sensitive to the needs of minority language parents and to the adjustment of their children in this particular educational context. Also, when educators involve minority parents as partners in their students' education, parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that is communicated to their children, resulting in positive academic consequences (1991).

Lily Wong Fillmore and her colleagues (Wong Fillmore, 1983) carried an in-depth investigation about the problem of adaptation of minority children and their families to their school environment. The notion of "cultural mismatch" is used throughout her research to explain the cultural and linguistic behaviours differences that occur between the home and the school of many minority students. There are, for example, implicit rules governing patterns of interaction in particular situation that are different among different cultural groups. There are also different schooling expectations from the parents of different cultural groups. These differences must be acknowledged by parents, teachers and support staff as they have educational implications. In fact, the research of Wong Fillmore shows that "cultural mismatch" is a significant contributor to minority student underachievement, but the difficulty is to identify them as they are subtle and largely unconscious. Therefore, much dialogue between the home and the school is needed to recognize and accept cultural differences and to increase compatibility between the two.

As this review of literature demonstrates, connecting families and schools is a major issue and must be regarded as a determining factor in the enhancement of all public school systems. However, as the Texas PTA states: "It is a formidable task

because families in today's society face increased demands on their time, have economic burdens that force them to work outside the home and severely limit the time they can spend with their children" (1992).

These challenges are often complicated by a lack of communication between schools and families where no proper infrastructure is in place to facilitate open communication. Therefore, it is necessary, when analysing the issues of parental involvement within the context of minority education, to identify whether or not this infrastructure exists to promote the involvement of the parents.

There are different models of infrastructure and the philosophy behind each of these models determines how much and in what ways parents will be involved. The Flint Board of Education, for example, defined parental involvement in these terms:

It is a relationship among students, families, school and the community. In its most effective form, it encourages and provides interaction among these stake holders through open channels of communication so all can play a role in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating school programs (1987).

The implementation of such a philosophy requires that all stake holders, including parents, teachers and administrators, understand the importance of working as a team and agree on the empowerment of each of the other intervenants. It also requires the willingness to reevaluate one's role in education. "Parents must perceive themselves as first educators of their children, teachers and administrators as facilitators of learning and life long learners, and students as active learners and participants of the learning process." (Pearson,1990). Hence, it requires a shift in public attitudes regarding the importance of learning and a willingness to be included as an active participant. The implementation of such a philosophy amounts to a

partnership model and it is of great significance for this research as my goal is to find out how exogamous parents can best be involved, as partners, in the context of minority education and how École Émilie-Tremblay can best adapt to the needs of its clientele.

There are, however, other models of parental involvement with different goals, outcomes and intrinsic values which I will describe to put the partnership model in perspective. I found the four models listed by Swap in Developing home-school partnerships, 1993, the most encompassing:

At one end of the spectrum, there is a Protective Model whose goal is to separate school and home thereby reducing conflict between them. Parents believe teachers are responsible for teaching children and only the schools are held accountable for the results. The link between home and school is done strictly through ritualised formats, such as an Open House or a Christmas Concert .

There are two middle models that promote specific kinds of parental involvement: the School - to - Home Transmission model and the Curriculum Enrichment model. The goal of the first one is to enlist parents in supporting the school's objectives while keeping them in a more subordinate role. In this case, the role of the parents is to endorse the importance of schooling and provide the conditions that lead to its success. Communication in this model is one-way (from the school out). As for the second model, its goal is to extend the school's curriculum by incorporating the contribution of families. Parents are involved as tutors or volunteers and their special expertise is drawn upon to enrich the curriculum. The focus of this model is on instruction. However, the values, the views and the history of the parents are also recognised as multicultural resources.

Finally, at the other end of the spectrum, there is the Partnership Model. Its goal is for parents and educators to work together to accomplish a common mission. It promotes a single, unified mission, as in keeping a language and a culture alive. This model enhances learning at home and at school, it provides mutual support and emphasises two-way communication. It allows and promotes joint decision making where collaboration between parents, community and educators becomes imperative.

The philosophy of the partnership model seems to be the underlying principle for the foundation of our French community school, as the success of such an institution is tied to the willingness and the capacity of its stake holders to be fully involved and to support the school's mission.

École Émilie-Tremblay 's single and unified mission is to assure the continuity of the French language and its many faceted culture by maintaining and developing French as the children's first language.

Research into language maintenance has demonstrated the importance of studying in one's first language to maintain normal cognitive development. Jim Cummins (1978;1980) argues that, in order to keep up in subject matter and maintain normal cognitive development, students need to develop high levels of first language competence. He writes:

Education in the first language is necessary to develop cognitive growth. Specifically, children need to develop not only basic interpersonal and communicative skills in their first language but also cognitive competence, the ability to use language effectively as an instrument of thought and represent cognitive operations by means of language. (Cummins 1978).

Moreover, maintaining one's first language and culture help build pride and

counter negative attitudes. In fact, Gardner and Lambert, 1972, found that language acquirers who do not reject their first language and culture succeed better in second language acquisition than those who reject it.

It is on these premises that French Canadian minority schools were officially recognized in 1982, when Chapter 23 of the Minority Language Educational Rights Bill instituted the right to receive education in either French or English depending on the mother tongue of the individual and the number of children in a particular community. This situation gave a unique role to their French parents; they became primarily vindicators of their rights. The constant struggle to obtain jurisdiction for their school system demanded a lot of determination, but involved the parents only in the political, and not the educational arena. A situation absolutely abnormal, argues Monsieur Bédard of la Commission Nationale des Parents Francophones (1995). Such was the case at École Émilie-Tremblay until 1995, when the trustees of the French School Board were sworn in for the first time.

Now that French communities across Canada manage their own school boards, it is time to redefine the role of the parents. "Car le véritable rôle des parents, c'est celui de premiers éducateurs de leurs enfants," (Bédard, 1995). (Translation: The primary role of parents is that of first educators of their children.)

The Commission believes that it is necessary to view all the parents as first educators of their children. The proof, they argue, is the vigour of the schools where parents fully participate.

The new school board at École Émilie-Tremblay, as are most French schools boards across the country, is opting for a partnership model. Developing an infrastructure that will facilitate open channels of communication between home and

school and will involve parents in decisional processes is a priority on the agendas of the administration and the school board. Language and cultural issues, however, underlie many barriers to involvement. The obvious difficulty in adopting such a model in the Yukon, is that many parents do not speak the French language.

The research of Statistics Canada's shows that, on average, 60% of students studying in French Canadian minority schools are from mixed French and English families. Our student enrolment list reflects Statistics Canada's research. Therefore, many parents are not francophone and they have generally remained on the outskirts of school life. How crucial is their participation and how can they best be involved? In what way can these parents contribute to their children's education, in the light of their own language and culture? Can they afford to exercise a passive role while others educate their children? How can École Émilie-Tremblay best adapt to the needs of these exogamous families and retain its mission?

Investigating the effort of the school environment to adapt to its clientele and the role of exogamous parents within the context of a French first language school is at the centre of this research. Most important is, what are the main factors that promote or impede the success of children from exogamous families whose parents have chosen French minority education?

Chapt 3: Methods

This research is qualitative in nature, an inquiry grounded in a real life situation. To fully understand the context in which I did my investigation, the description will include the three methods of collecting data used to conduct this research. I will also provide information on the parameters of this investigation. First, however, it will be necessary to explain the particulars of Whitehorse and of my school.

Whitehorse is located in the Yukon Territory and is roughly 3,000 kilometres from the larger southern Canadian cities, making it a rather isolated centre. Its population is 22,000 people among which 30% are of Native Ancestry. As Whitehorse is the capital city, there is a large territorial and federal government presence; it is also the transportation and communication hub of the territory. The vast majority of the adult population of Whitehorse works within these sectors.

The specific context in which I did my investigation is unique as École Émilie-Tremblay is the only French first language school in the Yukon Territory. École Émilie-Tremblay is a fairly new institution and its School Board, the first in the Yukon, was only sworn in, in December of 1995. Her "sister schools" throughout English speaking Canada are also very new. This is due to the fact that the French Canadian minority Schools were only recognized as an official institution in 1982. This is when Chapter 23 of the Minority Language Educational Rights Bill instituted the right to receive education in either French or English depending on the mother tongue of the individual and the number of children in a particular community. Statistics Canada, a government agency, defines minority language education as: "A program designed to offer the minority group (Anglophones in Québec and Francophones outside Québec)

education in their mother tongue. The minority language is used as the language of instruction for a large part of the school day." (1987)

Located in the capital city of Whitehorse, École Émilie-Tremblay has a population of ninety-eight students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12 which is at full capacity for the existing facilities. The school derives its population from approximately six hundred francophone citizens living in and around the city, about three percent (3%) of the total population of Whitehorse. The socioeconomic situation of the francophones residing in Whitehorse does not differ from the general Anglophone population; there are an equal percentage of blue and white collars workers among them.

École Émilie-Tremblay, as do all the Canadian francophone schools outside of Quebec, has a clientele from exogamous families. In fact, more than 65% of the students at our school are from heterolinguistic marriages, mostly French / English. The percentage of exogamous couples is higher here than any other provinces of Canada due to the small percentage of Francophones in the population of the Yukon; such a small population of French speaking people makes endogamy difficult.

In the past eight years École Émilie-Tremblay has progressed from a school within a school to a stand alone school. (In September 1996, the school will move to an entirely new building that will also host a French day care.) It is now a kindergarten to grade twelve French First language school offering French programs that are based on the same curriculum as its English counterparts. The curriculum documents are translated from English to French by the British Columbia Ministry of Education thereby ensuring curriculum equivalency. Students at École Émilie-Tremblay receive their instruction in French only, until they reach grade five. English is then formally

introduced, although most children have had a full immersion in English either from within their own exogamous family and / or from the media such as radio, television, newspapers and from most of the after school activities since Whitehorse is an 96% English speaking community.

Data collection for the project was threefold. Each source provided me with information about parental involvement and about the contributions of the school to the success of children's learning. The methods for collecting data are described below:

Questionnaires: I identified twelve students from exogamous families at the junior high and high school level and asked each to answer a questionnaire. The questions were written to investigate three areas of parental participation: academic, cultural and political. (See appendix A for questionnaire). The student's answers and comments would give me insights about the participation of their own family in these three areas.

Interviews: To get more in depth responses, I conducted interviews with students, parents, teachers and administrators. I also conducted three exit interviews with parents who decided to pull their children out of École Émilie-Tremblay.

I recorded comments concerning issues such as language of instruction, transmission of culture and the role of each participant. I investigated the parents' level of participation in the academic, cultural and political life of their school and community. Interviews also provided me information about the students feelings of well being in our school.

Student Files: I took a close look at six students' personnel files to

investigate their report cards and their behaviour since kindergarten. The report cards were either descriptive or criterion in nature. Academic and emotional information were provided through this data.

I also kept an observation journal, which allowed me to record parent's participation in activities that happened during school hours or during French community events. For example, I made note that some exogamous families attend the Friday night Café Rencontre on a regular basis while others choose not to, and some families, like mine, go to the Café occasionally. I used my journal to interpret and comment about the school and the French community's life on a regular basis. These field notes were kept on a regular basis from September 15, 1995 to January 30, 1995.

I found it necessary to limit this research to the parameters and categories described below as other variables could push the limits of this research paper beyond its scope:

- 1) All the students interviewed come from a two parent household.
- 2) The mother's first language is French.
- 3) The father's first language is English.

In addition to these parameters I have also defined three categories of parental involvement: I call the first one academic involvement, the second one cultural involvement and the third one sociopolitical involvement. Academic involvement includes all the intellectual and affective support provided by the family to enhance cognitive growth of their children, whether it is done in French, in English or in any other language. The cultural involvement includes the different ways of reaching the

French community cultural life as a family. Lastly, the sociopolitical involvement of the parents would be all the support given to different school committees to contribute to the quality of our school.

In order to analyse the data collected and to create a clear picture of the situation, I reviewed my field notes repeatedly in an effort to identify emerging patterns. I also continued asking questions to parents, students, teachers and administrators to challenge my initial interpretations.

Chapt 4: Results

I have discovered four main issues that determine whether or not exogamous parents will get involved in our school and how much this involvement influence their children's success, academically and socially.

The first issue deals with the parents' awareness of their role in their children's education, recognizing that they are the primary and most important educators. The second issue pertains to our school mission and whether the parents have or do not have a clear concept of the "raison d'être" of l'École Émilie-Tremblay. They need to understand this concept in order to make an informed decision as to whether or not the school is the right choice for their family. The third issue concerns the adaptation of our School Board, our school policies and our school staff to its unique exogamous clientele. Finally, the fourth issue is of a linguistic nature. It deals with the willingness and the ability of the Anglophone parents to embrace the French language and culture in order to participate in their children's education.

There are other socioeconomic and emotional factors that influence the success of a child's learning but this research focusses on the promotion of or impediment to parental involvement, and how it affects the student's chance of success.

I will expand on each of these four issues separately, demonstrating their importance in influencing the success of children from exogamous families in our school. Within each of these issues I found emerging themes and patterns that often affect more than one issue. Although I will elaborate on these issues linearly, patterns are interconnected.

1) An awareness of the educational role of the parent

Steven and Marie Duncan are an English/French couple that have been living in Whitehorse since 1983. Steven is a generalist Doctor and Marie works part time as a Public Nurse. They have two children, Marc, a six year old boy, and Mabel, a twelve year old girl, both of whom are enrolled at École Émilie-Tremblay. In grade five, however, Mabel has switched back and forth from the French Immersion Program to our school, after her parents concluded that she would be better off in a French first language program after all. Steven told me that, although the French Immersion Program offered more options and had single level class, the rhythm of Anglophones who learn French as a second language was too slow for Mabel whose proficiency in French was ahead of her classmates. Steven also told me, "As an Anglophone, I felt that I could be more involved in the French Immersion Program, but it is a trade-off as Mabel seems happier at École Émilie-Tremblay."

In the Duncan family, both parents are involved in their children's education using their respective first language. As Steven states: "I have always read to my daughter in English; it seems to relax her (and me), even in grade seven."

These parents perceive themselves as first educators of their children. Steve supports his children using the language that he is most comfortable with but his understanding of the French language is increasing as his oldest daughter Mabel is progressing through her school career. He takes the opportunity to learn French with his family as the children always interact in French with their mother. Marie tells us that it is a house rule, "It is fundamental that my children address me in French because, outside their school, there are very few French speaking adults around. My husband interacts with them mainly in English."

In this case, both parents take an active role in their children's education, in their own capacity and with their own philosophy and they recognize each other's expertise and value: "I find my husband to be very open-minded with respect not only to the French culture itself, but also to many human realities that differ from his own." says Marie.

Reviewing the report cards of Mabel, the Duncan's oldest daughter, I found this grade seven student has had academic success since kindergarten and that her teachers and her classmates have enjoyed her motivation, "Mabel's motivation appears throughout all her work" is a general comment in her student file. As an occasional substitute teacher in her English class and as a team-teacher in her French and Social Studies classes I have noticed her proficiency in both languages and her vast wealth of general information. She is very articulate in both languages and her oral and written performance in French is comparable with her peers from endogamous families. When I asked Mabel who is helping her at home with her school work, she told me, "Both my Mom and Dad are helping me, but only when I need it. Sometimes Steven helps me finding information and Marie helps me with French spelling and grammar."

Her answer reflects the ideology and attitudes of her parents as the primary educators of their children. The case of this grade seven student is typical of several other students from exogamous families who are academically supported by their family, however, as Marie pointed out to me in an interview, "I find that raising children in both languages and wanting them to have good skills in both languages demands a lot a perseverance." Students like Mabel, who receive academic support at home, have great chances of succeeding regardless of the school system.

The case of the Mathier- Lewis family is also a good example of exogamous couples who have chosen French education for their children and have acknowledged their role as first educator: Ben Lewis, the Anglophone father of two children attending École Émilie-Tremblay, involves his children in many aspects of his life, such as his hobbies as a carpenter and a storyteller. He is slowly learning French as he takes part in his children's school life.

Caroline, the Mathier-Lewis's youngest daughter, is in kindergarten and is adjusting easily to her new school life. Her comprehension of the French language is obvious as she responds positively to her teacher or her peers' instructions, but her language production is almost strictly in English yet. Her mother says, "Although she seems a little tired after a whole day in school, Caroline is very happy and anxious to attend both her kindergarten class in the morning and her special French class in the afternoon."

Cédric, Caroline's older brother, is a happy and motivated grade three student who loves writing and sharing his stories with his peers. Cedric received linguistic support to gain fluency in French while he was in kindergarten and during the first semester of grade one. These measures, coupled with the academic home support, helped Cédric reach the level of his peers in all his subject areas.

Academic support has to come from both parents. However, the Anglophone partner in the couple has to make an extra effort to be involved in the education of their children and, concurrently, need to learn some French to be attuned with the school life. Steve and Ben, the two fathers mentioned above are examples of parents who are making this extra effort.

Otherwise there is a danger that the role of academic supporter is left to the

Francophone spouse while the Anglophone parent stays out of the educational scene. These mothers or fathers may feel useless and handicapped or may simply choose not to become involved as this father did: "I do not participate in the French schooling because I do not feel it is my concern, it is a choice made by my wife, and therefore, her responsibility." (Alberta, 1994). This feeling was reflected by a few of the parents that were interviewed at l'École Émilie-Tremblay as: "I am afraid to bastardise the language, so I prefer that my spouse help with homework". The non academic involvement by one or by both parents has a serious negative effect on the student's motivational attitude; it sends a strong message that school is not relevant to real life and it leaves the child without the necessary support and modelling at home. Research on empowerment of students confirm that these children are in a precarious position, as noted by Metcalf & Gaier in this review of literature.

Students in this situation often require extra school support, as they are unable to keep up with their peers particularly in language skills. Support is provided by the homeroom teacher and by a Francisation Program which is a form of learning assistance focussing on linguistic skills.

As the teacher in charge of the Francisation Program, I have strong evidence that the school's effort must be matched by parental input into the child's education. Otherwise, our intervention has only a short term effect and the child's progress and motivation decline each school year. Too often, the end result is students with difficulty in most academic areas and parents that blame and reject the school system.

The case of the Cooder's family is typical of many exogamous families who have left our school with mixed feelings: Guy and Jessica, the children of Marie Lafleur and Rory Cooder have both received extra linguistic support for a number of years

through our Francisation program and with their homeroom teachers. Despite all these efforts, they transferred to the French Immersion school in January 1996, when the mother realised that she could not give them adequate support and that her children's' academic difficulties were not disappearing.

Marie is of French descent but, as many other francophones in Western Canada, she has been assimilated into the English majority and is now only fluent in English, although she still understands her mother tongue. She often said to me: "I want my children to take advantage of the chance they have to learn French as well as English; I am so happy there is a French School."

Rory, her husband, was not supportive of her decision to send the children to a French School. During an interview with the Cooders, Rory told me, "I understand that they need a little French to talk to Mami (the grand-mother Lafleur) but the world is an English one and it ain't with French that my kids gonna make it."

Both Rory and Marie want their children to be bilingual as do most Canadian parents. Our school's main objective, however, is not to form bilingual citizens; its foremost mission is to transmit a language and different aspects of a culture to future generations in order to counteract the phenomena of assimilation.

Obviously, neither Rory nor Marie could embrace the school's efforts for their children because their objective and ours were different and misunderstood. Their expectations of the school did not correspond to the main mission of École Émilie-Tremblay.

2) A clear concept of the mission of École Émilie-Tremblay:

Its "raison d'être".

The mission of École Émilie-Tremblay is to confer the French language and its culture to the students while giving them education equity with the English students. Parents who choose French education and adhere to this mission will usually be involved in the socio-cultural events of the community. It is often this additional commitment that makes a significant difference for their children. Students involved in cultural activities have a greater sense of identity with the school, as one student said, "I like to go to the Café Rencontre because I meet my friends from the school and we play." Le Café Rencontre has become an institution in Whitehorse as a meeting place of various francophile and francophone families for different socio-cultural events. Most important, the children who frequent the Café Rencontre with their parents have the chance to hear and use French language outside of their school and their homes. Otherwise, opportunities for these children to use the French language in Whitehorse are limited.

While reviewing the report cards of Junior High students who have been frequenting socio-cultural events, I saw a relationship between academic success and cultural involvement, but it is very difficult to draw a direct correlation between the two, as there are many other factors that can influence the successes of students from exogamous families. There are, however, indications that students are more comfortable with their school life when their families are culturally involved. Louise, a grade nine student remarked, "It is important to participate in French community activities to feel accepted by my peers at school."

This statement exemplifies how important it is for students to feel accepted and comfortable in their school setting. This comfort zone is often a necessary prerequisite to succeed in academic tasks and can not be neglected. Therefore, the participation of both the Anglophone and the Francophone parent in the French community may have an impact on the decision of their children to pursue their studies in French when reaching high school levels. Teenagers especially have to be convinced of the value of keeping their language and culture. The strength of personal beliefs in the vitality of their first language and their ethnolinguistic identity will determine if they will use the French language or not , as Louise says,

I have to say I am French first. It is so precious and there is so little of it. Je ne veux pas garder mon français juste à la maison. Je ne veux pas le faire en cachette". (Translation: I do not want to keep my language at home. I do not want to hide it.)

Louise's exogamous parents have a home with a strong French ambiance and her parents contribute to the French ambiance of the school, as much as possible.

Unfortunately, I found through personal interviews with parents, that many exogamous parents do not promote a French ambiance in their home nor do they have a clear idea of the role of the French school. Utilitarian reasons predominate and the primary concern is to have their children become bilingual in order to give them the best chance of economic success in life. This idea exemplifies the philosophy of the French Immersion Program which is a program designed primarily for English speaking students. As Peter, the father of Karine, a grade one student, expresses it, "I am an English Canadian, my wife is French, therefore, our children will be bilingual and have the best opportunities of employment when they graduate from an English

University."

The objective of the French Immersion Program is to provide the child with a working knowledge of the French language in an English environment, thereby promoting bilingualism. In contrast, the French First Language school's goal is not only to teach a French curriculum but to transmit the language and aspects of the French culture to future generations.

It is not surprising that eight of the twelve exogamous couples interviewed told me that they doubted the wisdom of their decision to send their children to École Émilie-Tremblay several times since kindergarten. The option for these parents of choosing the French Immersion Program is always a possibility and it is considered as a viable alternative. From an utilitarian point of view, the Immersion Program is a logical alternative. When Marie Lafleur and Rory Cooder transferred their children to the French immersion program last January, Marie told me, "I am doing it for family peace; I am tired of arguing with my family whether the French school is worth it; we have been questioning it since Jessica was in grade two."

This continual questioning can adversely affect the child's motivation and success as children need to feel the approval of both their parents in regard to their education.

Exogamous couples are often uncertain, in regard to the manner of French instruction of their children, as they are faced with difficult choices concerning cultural identity, the education of their children, the language of instruction and the transmission of culture.

For the educators in our school, it becomes difficult to empower minority students whose families are uncertain of their educational choice. Our personal

confidence and our courage to defend minority students' education rely in part on the motivation of the French community and all the parents involved. When a family decides to pull its children out, each member of the staff is concerned. Discussions and comments flourish in the staff room but most of the time as Martine our grade one teacher said, "It was to be expected, because children whose family are not strongly involved will eventually leave." Another staff member added: "It is hard to loose Guy and Jessica but really, this school's primary goal is to transmit the French culture and this family did not embrace the goal at all."

Exogamous parents, which account for about sixty five percent of our school, can only make a judicious choice when they understand the difference between the French Immersion Program and the French First Language Program. Once they understand the differences it is up to them to choose what they feel is best for their children.

For the 1996-1997 school year, information seminars will be given to parents prior to registering their children for the next kindergarten session. It will be the first time that our school will hold an information session strictly in this regard. It is these sessions that will help parents make an informed decision regarding their choice of school.

Some parents, however, will opt for École Émilie-Tremblay simply because of the low student / teacher ratio and the exposure to a rich French environment. In these cases the decision of the parents has little to do with adhering to the school's mission and everything to do with choosing what they feel is best for their children. The school is precieved as a high quality French Immersion program for their children. For these parents, the decision of opting for French first language schooling will be reevaluated

as the child enters intermediate and secondary levels. Parents, at that point, will often consider social and academic choices or the mastery of the English language as a priority over student / teacher ratio or the rich French environment. In an exit-interview with Michelle, a Francophone mother who transferred her son to the French Immersion Program, I recorded this statement,

I think that we have to differentiate between the importance of a quality education and the transmission of French culture that is given in a precarious academic environment. I do not feel the culture transmission should prevail on students academic ambitions and motivations. École Émilie-Tremblay excels academically at the elementary level but it needs a lot of adjustments at the high-school level. When the school will have more to offer in term of specialized and adequate programs, I will reconsider the choice I made with and for Marc.

Interviews with other parents who have children entering École Émilie-Tremblay in September 1996 reveal similar sentiments as those of Michelle.

Students from French endogamous families, however, tend to stay longer as the parents have stronger personal beliefs in the value of the French language and a stronger ethnolinguistic identity, therefore the transmission of the French culture takes precedent over other academic or social choices. Before students ever enter a classroom for the first time, many endogamous families have already made an implicit commitment to the school's mission and to its teachers. As Julie, the Grade 12 student from an endogamous family at École Émilie-Tremblay affirms, "It is crucial for me and my family that my brothers and I graduate from a French institution successfully and that we continue to carry on the French and Acadian cultures."

As a parent, knowing and understanding the mission and the role of École Émilie-Tremblay is important because the school has a specific mission and it may not coincide with the priorities of certain parents in terms of education. It is not necessary for all parents to fully adhere to the mission of the school but it is crucial to give strong

academic support at home for children to succeed, particularly in the context of a minority school.

Hopefully, there will be a time where it will not be necessary to make a choice between a rich French educational environment and a greater selection of specialized subject for students. It will, however, require adaptation and flexibility from the school authorities as some of the classes being offered may have to be a joint venture with the immersion program or may have to be offered in English. This attitude may allow for a continuity in the academic structure, and parental support.

In September 1996, the school will be moving to a new location with much larger and better facilities. It will be interesting to see if a larger percentage of students from exogamous families will pursue their studies at École Émilie-Tremblay and graduate from this institution.

3) The adaptation of École Émilie-Tremblay to its clientele

Unlike other provinces where there is a large percentage of French speaking people, Francophones comprise only three percent of the Yukon population. The clientele at École Émilie-Tremblay is thirty five percent from French endogamous families and sixty five percent from exogamous families and no matter what the consequences, exogamy is there to stay.

The religious barriers between Canadian Francophones and Anglophones, who were traditionally Catholic and Protestant, are no longer an obstacle to marriage. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this study, the smaller the demographic weight of a cultural group, the higher the rate of exogamy.

Our school is expecting increasing levels of children who live in exogamous families. The survival of our school depends a great deal upon this clientele. The newly elected School Board, in which three out of five trustees are in an exogamous relationship, and the administration of the school are aware of this problematic situation. As Joane, a trustee of the French School Board, says, "As many other French minority schools in the country, the survival of École Émilie-Tremblay depends on the registration of children from exogamous families."

Consequently, many efforts are made to provide linguistic support for these children before they even enter kindergarten, and to students throughout their primary grades. A pilot program called *Françisation* was instigated, at École Émilie-Tremblay in September 1992, with the ultimate goal of giving linguistic support to children who require it. This special program was funded through Patrimoine Canada, a national government organisation with the mandate of promoting and preserving Canadian

official languages.

The program of Françisation has proven to be highly beneficial for the well being, and to the academic success of exogamous students in École Émilie-Tremblay.

Julie, the kindergarten teacher at École Émilie-Tremblay, tells us how much of a difference it makes by giving these children extra support. She speaks in these terms, "At the beginning of the school year, these children do not speak French at all. They need the afternoon Françisation program to learn the language at their own rhythm, otherwise they are lost during regular class activities."

These measures, however, can become futile if they are not coupled with home support as reported in the first section of the Data Analysis (analysis of the Cooder family). The Françisation Program must be incorporated in a much larger support package in which the parents are fully involved. Children need to develop an intrinsic motivation in regard to the French language and culture.

This year, for the first time, our school offered a literacy support program. During five consecutive weeks, we met with a group of parents with children in kindergarten and grade one to share ideas, books, songs, rhymes and specific reading strategies. All parents invited had children academically at risk. The goal of these short participation sessions was to involve the parents more effectively in their children's reading and writing. Each session was designed to help parents support their child's learning at home using simple activities and children's books with an assignment to be discussed at the next session. These sessions were conducted in French but translation was readily available to include as many parents as possible. Our goal was to provide support in an atmosphere of confidence and partnership.

As a return, it was a great opportunity to learn from these parents about

language and cultural issues in their families. I also gained, by actively participating in these sessions, a first hand understanding of how parents develop into more vital first educators

The evaluation by the participants indicate a desire from parents to understand and be involved in school activities. It also reveals the need to have support groups in order to share ideas with other adults. In his evaluation form, Jimmy wrote, " I liked the five sessions because I learned about children and I liked it because there was exchanges of ideas with other adults. I hope they will continue."

This five weeks program is an example of how the school has reached out to its clientele. It was a first step toward providing us with a better sense of the needs of parents. It has allowed us to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of this group and gives us a better sense of how we can include parents in our school life.

Goals that we obtained in these sessions may prove to be beneficial on a larger scale. For example, exogamous parents at École Émilie-Tremblay may also benefit from a support group where questions of ethnolinguistic identity can be discussed as well as practical issues such as homework.

This Parent Action for Literacy Support group (PALS) also revealed the importance to gain a complete and accurate picture of the population which we serve. We need to identify the different types of endogamous and exogamous couples who choose French education for their children and what their expectations are. A better understanding of these types of families will give the school a chance to better serve its clientele and probably augment its numbers. As Marco, an elected official of the School Board stated, " We must have a better picture of our clientele to better understand their needs and their expectations of the school. We must also try to

include all parents, endogamous and exogamous, in the school life to have a unified vision in mind."

École Émilie-Tremblay has, since February 1996, a parent committee independent of the School Board, so exogamous as well as endogamous parents have a better infrastructure in place to voice their opinions and to suggest ideas to the school administration. This new organism is also a first step from the school to adapt and to gain knowledge of its clientele as it is an infrastructure that allows for individuals to be involved and to be heard regardless of their language ability. However, for unilingual Anglophones to take part in these meeting, it will require an extra effort, as it is difficult to participate in meetings that are mostly conducted in French. It requires the tolerance of language ambiguity and openness on all parts.

4) A disposition toward the French education and culture

The parents committee meetings, discussed above, must be regarded as an opportunity by Anglophones to be immersed in the French language while being involved as a first and primary educator. It is a place where both Francophone and Anglophone parents meet for a common goal: improving the educational setting of their children. Some Anglophone parents have taken this opportunity, as in the Mathier-Lewis family. In this regard, Ben says with a grin, "This is a way to immerse myself in the language; I understand most of everything but when I have a comment to make or if I am concerned about an issue I still have to intervene in English at least until my French improves."

Other parents, however, do not feel comfortable in an atmosphere of language ambiguity and do not participate in the school life of École Émilie-Tremblay because of language barriers. Peter's comment, "I would never go to these meetings. The fact that everything is in French is a turn-off" is an indication of his non tolerance to language ambiguity and it, unfortunately, reveals the sentiment of other Anglophone parents that I have interviewed.

As a Core French teacher during five years, I dealt with a similar attitudinal problem. I had, every September, many reluctant learners who reminded me of Peter. To overcome the reluctance of these beginner students, I began a few lessons by proving to my students how much their level of "tolerance to ambiguity" would help them learning a second language. I would demonstrate to them, how to read body language and facial expressions as well as guessing the overall meaning of my speech. My students were amazed and proud of how much the familiar context I

utilized gave them clues to understand French. They were also surprised to know that twenty five thousand words in French and in English are identical. Once their intrinsic motivation was built, it was much easier to tackle French grammar.

Monolingual parents may need help in developing a positive language learning attitude, and may also benefit from receiving French as a second language instruction, especially when they have chosen French education for their children and desire to be part of it.

What characterises Anglophone spouses, seems to be their concern to ensure that their children become bilingual, while the Francophone spouse often assumes responsibility for transmitting the French culture and heritage proper. This may be a good agreement for promoting language transmission, as long as the concern for cultural reproduction is understood and accepted by both exogamous parents. The Anglophone spouse must, therefore, support the Francophone parent's attempt to pass on the French culture. As Ben once told me, "We had to overemphasise the French language because we could see the English influence is so great. It is important that they speak English well. It has to be both."

Francophone spouses must also be conscious of their important role as transmitter of the culture. Sometimes, however, Francophone parents do not feel comfortable conversing in French in the presence of Anglophones. They express their concerns in terms of acceptance and politeness toward unilingual Anglophones. Therefore, English predominates in their homes and French is used with their children only occasionally. These types of exogamous families are the most in danger of losing their French ethnolinguistic identity and their children will most likely assimilate to the dominant culture.

In the questionnaire, students reveal the sentiments of their parents in terms of cultural identity; if the French mother is convinced of the values of transmitting her culture and the Anglophone father is supporting it, students tend to engage in activities in the French and English communities. The affirmation of their bicultural identity becomes natural, as Shawn, a grade ten student responded in the questionnaire, "I find that speaking both English and French is great. I talk with more people and I play more songs on my guitar."

On the other hand, if one of the parent has a reluctant disposition toward the French language and culture, their children may find it difficult to be at peace with different cultural systems. They may be confused about their self-identity. The typical answers, from these students, to the question: "Do you think that it is important that your family communicate in French at home and outside the home?" was, "I don't know... I am not sure...". These answers indicate the malaise of these students as they have been educated in a French minority school for several years but have mixed feeling about their ethnolinguistic identity.

Biculturalism conveys important intellectual advantages as it is an opportunity to view the world with two language systems. The formation of thought is possible in both languages and, therefore, gives the chance to individuals to develop strong critical thinking skills.

However, biculturalism entails stress, especially concerning self-identity. Bicultural students, from exogamous families must feel at peace with the different cultural values that are vehiculated in their home and their social environment. They need the approbation and the support of both parents to pursue study successfully in a French minority school. Otherwise they may experience conflicting self-identity and reject their mother tongue altogether.

Chapt 5: Conclusion

Since I have been living in Whitehorse, many Anglophones parents have asked my opinion in regard to choosing the French Immersion Program option for their children. This, in turn, has forced me to analyse the situation. For many parents, it can be a difficult task to choose the right type of education for their children.

Whitehorse Anglophone parents, for example, may opt for a regular mainstream school, a home based school, or they may choose the French Immersion Program. The latter choice is enticing due to the fact that French and English are both official Canadian languages and it is believed that individuals have more employment opportunities if bilingual.

The French Immersion Program, for many Canadian Anglophone families, is a good choice, providing that parents understand what it entails for their children and for themselves to pursue this type of education.

I do not believe, however, that this program is the right choice for every Anglophone family. I have seen too many students struggle for years, and frustrated parents who could not help their children. Many of these French Immersion students eventually leave the program and returned to regular English schools. The result, unfortunately, is poor language skills in both French and English for too many students.

So, what is the best choice? Although, there is no easy answer, my response has been quite consistent over the years. I tell them that I believe in the necessity of being fully involved in their children's education. In turn, I ask parents to question their willingness to learn some French and to occasionally expose their children to a French environment. I also remind them of the necessity, regardless of the educational

setting, to have a rich language environment at home, so that the children can fully develop in their first language. I explain how language abilities are transferable from L1 to L2 and how children need a good basic knowledge of their mother tongue, otherwise the exposure to a second language can impede the child's cognitive development.

I would give the same answer to exogamous couples who are considering French First Language education for their children. The same principles prevail. These couples need to understand what it entails to pursue education in a French minority context.

The use of the English language in the community and frequently in the home of exogamous families is often predominant, making it difficult for children to study successfully in French. It can lead to students being at risk in their language skills as neither the French nor the English language is fully mastered. In order to succeed in school and to avoid such a precarious situation, students from exogamous families need to be exposed frequently to their language of instruction. They also need to have an academically and culturally supportive home environment with a strong French ambiance.

Exogamous families have a real advantage as each of the parents carry their own cultural inheritance. Their home environment can be a source of enrichment for both, the children and the parents.

However, English and French spouses must be made aware of how great an influence they have on their children's motivation and academic ability. Both parents must be made aware of their linguistic influence on their children. They ought to realise that it will require perseverance to support their children studying in a French

minority school as the dominant language and culture is often overwhelming. Basic notions about the nature of language learning and the implications of mother tongue maintenance must be addressed and understood by parents who contemplate French minority education.

Information seminars must be provided to exogamous parents prior to registering their children to kindergarten. Parents must understand the differences in objectives between the French Immersion Program and the French First Language Program. These sessions must also accentuate the necessity of parental academic support whether it is in English or in French. Only then will exogamous parents make a judicious choice of schooling for their children and be committed as a family.

The school's main contribution to the success of its students, after providing information seminar to parents, is to promote a proactive approach of learning. Particularly in the context of minority education, it is crucial to have full participation of the parents and of the community to make sure that the effort to keep a culture and a language alive are concomitant.

Rather than having a passive role in the school, students and parents must develop a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their school and toward learning. École Émilie-Tremblay's primary mission must be to develop an intrinsic motivation to learning and to empower its clientele so that they have a desire to make the French culture alive.

As this African folk saying advises, "It takes a village to raise a child". Neither parents or teachers alone can do it, one must consider all the stake holders and work together.

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APPENDIX A

Salut! _____ Savais-tu que je suis aussi étudiante depuis 3 ans? Je fais une recherche à propos des élèves de l'école Émilie Tremblay. J'aimerais que tu me donnes ton avis au sujet de l'influence des adultes quant à ton succès scolaire.

Tout comme toi, je fais partie d'une famille mixte. C'est à dire Francophone / Anglophone (ou autre). Tout comme toi ma famille a décidé de fréquenter l'école française.

Savais-tu que plus de 65% des élèves de notre école proviennent d'une famille mixte? C'est à dire qu'un des parents n'est pas Francophone.

Je me demande comment les parents non-francophones peuvent s'impliquer dans notre école et aider leurs enfants? Alors j'ai préparé ce questionnaire pour connaître ce que tu penses.

Je te remercie de participer à ma recherche.

Denise Beauchamp

1- Es-ce ton père ou ta mère qui est Francophone? _____

2- Est-ce-que ton père et ta mère t'ont lu des histoires, quand tu étais jeune? En Anglais ou en Français? Et maintenant? _____

3- Est-ce-que ton père et ta mère t'aident avec tes devoirs, tes recherches ou ton projet de foire de la science? Qui t'aidait lorsque tu étais plus jeune? _____

4- Est-ce que ton père ou ta mère viennent aux réunions de Parents? Penses-tu que c'est à cause de la langue s' ils ne viennent pas? _____

5-Qu'est-ce que tes parents aiment lire? Et toi? _____

5- Penses-tu que c'est important que ta famille participe aux activités de l'AFY? Pourquoi? _____

Utilise l'autre côté de cette feuille si tu en as besoin. Les fautes ne comptent pas...Toutes les réponses sont correctes.